

# New Mexico Legislative Education Study Committee

1965-2015

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## Message from the Chair:

### Challenges and Opportunities for Rural Schools

Greetings!

Last month, the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) had the privilege of holding its interim meeting in Raton, which I am proud to represent in House District 67, and I'd like to express my gratitude to both the community and the school district for the hospitality they showed the LESC.

During the meeting, Raton Public Schools Superintendent Neil Terhune described a startling trend: enrollment in Raton schools had fallen from 1426 students in school year 2005-2006 to 975 students in school year 2014-2015 – a decline of over 31 percent in 10 years! As we know, neighborhood schools form the bedrock of many communities, acting as a source of civic pride and common experience that can span generations, but our small towns continue to deal with the kind of challenges Raton is dealing with. In the face of such challenges, I therefore commend the leadership of the Raton Public Schools for coming together and making the difficult but necessary decision to consolidate several of its schools.

In my own work as the superintendent of a rural school district, I know all too well that the challenges highlighted by Superintendent Terhune are not unique. Like our urban neighbors, folks in small communities want our children to graduate prepared for either college or the workforce. Yet simultaneously, we struggle to maintain an economic environment that will draw them back home with the promise of a stable career. As this cycle continues, local economic revitalization and a strong, accountable public school system are inextricably linked in securing the viability of our state's rural communities for generations to come.

The Legislature has worked to improve the financial outlook of our small school districts. In 2014, legislation introduced by Representatives Jimmie C. Hall, Nora Espinoza, and David M. Gallegos, who are all members of the LESC, was enacted in a bipartisan effort to increase formula funding for school districts with fewer than 200 students and reduce their dependence on long-term, recurring emergency supplemental funding. Although it has served as a necessary lifeline, emergency supplemental funding for school districts – like many other well-intentioned centralized programs – comes with strings attached that threaten to strangle local control of the educational process. Moving away from this dependency has been a step in the right direction.

Other financial challenges remain, however. At the LESC meeting in June, the committee heard testimony that small school districts are especially susceptible to large swings in a funding formula factor called the Training & Experience (T&E) Index that attempts to adjust for the cost of employing instructional staff based on years of experience and degree attainment. Because the T&E Index acts as a multiplier in the formula, a very small district which loses even a single veteran teacher can find that its formula funding is decreased substantially.

The LESC will therefore continue to work on possible revisions to the T&E Index. In addition, the committee will also examine other programs with a focus on successful policies implemented by rural school districts and the opportunity to highlight their best practices. For the next LESC meeting in Rio Rancho on July 21-22, the committee will hear from Superintendent Tom Sullivan of the Moriarty-Edgewood School District about how that district has designed a student transportation program for a district covering a large geographic area. Then, at the August 27-28 meeting in Roswell, the LESC will learn from rural school districts how they successfully leverage regional support through the Public Education Department's *Reads to Lead!* program to collaboratively employ reading coaches and improve literacy outcomes for their young students.

I know firsthand how daunting the challenges are which face schools outside of the state's metropolitan centers, but I also know that if we approach these challenges with the same work ethic and perseverance that defines rural New Mexico, there is nothing our small schools and communities can't accomplish.

Sincerely,

Representative Dennis J. Roch  
Chair

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# WHAT You Need to Know About...

## *Training and Experience Index*

- ✓ The T&E Index was established within the public school funding formula, in part, to promote the recruitment and retention of experienced or highly-educated teachers within school districts.
- ✓ Each school district and charter school has its own T&E Index based on the instructional staff it employs.
- ✓ Historically, between 8 and 10 percent of formula funding has been attributable to T&E, but on average, T&E Indices have been declining over the last several years.
- ✓ The T&E Index has not been updated to incorporate cost differences from 3-Tier teacher licensure.

## *Instructional Material:*

- ✓ Instructional material is funded from federal *Mineral Land Leasing Act* revenue.
- ✓ Private school and adult basic education students, in addition to public school students, benefit from instructional material funding.
- ✓ The *Instructional Material Law* requires that every public school student have a textbook for each class and be allowed to take those textbooks home.
- ✓ Schools are currently unable to expend much of their instructional material allocation on utilizing the full breadth of digital material available.



**How Does the Public School Funding Formula Work?:** LESC staff explained that at its core, the funding formula assigns each student a certain number of program units based on the student's characteristics including, among other factors, grade level and special education status. Those program units, and a handful of other units based characteristics not specific to individual students, are added together for each school district or charter school, and the funding formula calculates a program cost for each district and charter school by multiplying those units times a uniform dollar amount per unit, also known as the "unit value." Certain deductions of local and federal revenue are then made before arriving at the State Equalization Guarantee distribution for school districts and charter schools.

**Instructional Staff Training & Experience Index:** A major component of the education reform legislation enacted by the 2003 Legislature was the three-tiered licensure and evaluation system for teachers. The current public school funding formula includes a Training and Experience (T&E) Index, which predates those 2003 reforms and is based on years of service and academic degrees rather than licensure level. LESC staff described the recent trends in the T&E Index for individual school districts relative to the long-term, 10-year averages, explaining that:

- the composition of statewide funding formula units attributable to the T&E Index has accounted for between 8.0 percent and 12 percent of program cost;
- large variations in the T&E Index, both negative and positive, were most common in small school districts; and
- large school districts have had mixed experiences, but changes were relatively small in magnitude.

Staff also referred to two studies from which the LESC had received recommendations for altering the T&E Index to align with the state's three-tiered licensure from Augenblick, Palaich and Associates, Inc. in 2003 and the American Institutes for Research in 2008.

The superintendent of Las Cruces Public Schools informed the committee that the issue they may wish to contemplate is several fold, noting that:

- the largest studies on the T&E Index structure should be reviewed;
- a viable solution will cost money;
- winners and losers are a reality for superintendents;
- without hold harmless, larger districts would require supplemental funding similar to the micro-districts; and
- \$1.0 million employs about 20 teachers and 10 educational assistants on the average in New Mexico, and 1.0 percent of the statewide education budget is more than \$20.0 million.





**Virtual Education and Cyber Learning:** After an overview of LESC interim reports on this topic from 2012-2014, LESC staff noted that both full-time virtual schools currently operating in New Mexico generated less funding per MEM than both the statewide average and the average for charter schools, which apparently is a result of several factors, such as:

- values on the Training & Experience Index below the statewide average;
- lower special education rates than other charter schools or the statewide average; and
- below-average add-on units, such as size adjustment and enrollment.

Next, the Principal and Program Manager of the Rio Rancho Cyber Academy (RRCA) presented on best practices for blended learning and noted that, unlike fully online education, blended learning is, in part, student-directed by their control over their own learning pace via online delivery and, in part, teacher-led in a supervised brick-and-mortar location. Total enrollment at RRCA for school year 2014-2015 was 164 students. Moreover, RRCA:

- is an accredited public middle and high school, serving grades 6-12, within Rio Rancho Public Schools; and
- requires attendance by middle school students on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and high school students on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Regarding best practices at RRCA, the program at the academy transfers to students “ownership” of:

- “engagement,” which focuses on issues such as motivation, both internal and external, and the manner in which a student’s work will fit into their life plan;
- “progress,” focusing on whether and why a student might not be on track for their own educational plan; and
- “achievement,” encouraging students to focus on study strategies that work for them, while also prompting students to question their lack of mastery in certain areas.

The presentation concluded with a review of the school’s successes, including:

School Grade Report Cards, which, for school years 2011-

- 2012 through 2013-2014, were ‘B,’ ‘A,’ and ‘A’;
- graduation rates, which for the class of 2014 was 91 percent for all students;
- end-of-course exams results; and
- PSAT achievement, which for school year 2014-2015 showed 52.9 percent of RRCA students on track for college and career readiness, compared with a national rate of 37.2 percent.

The Vice President of State Relations at Connections Education informed the LESC on purely online education at Connections schools. She noted that while full-time online

learning is not appropriate for every student, it should be an available option for all students, and added that approximately 35 percent of newly enrolled virtual students are not proficient in math, and approximately 30 percent are credit deficient. Virtual students tend to have high levels of mobility, and to address these issues, Connections has responded by increasing family support, including daily support sessions, a family mentor program, and a new learning coach



central website.

Regarding academic performance, reading and math proficiency reviews at Connections academies in South Carolina, Iowa, New Mexico, and Wyoming indicate that performance levels were either better than or commensurate with state levels in all grade-levels for all four states.

Policy considerations with regard to academic performance include:

- withdrawal from enrollment for students who regularly fail to participate in courses according to certain procedures established by a particular virtual school; and
- conferring with parents, teachers, and school leaders to consider if online instruction is appropriate for a student if his or her academic achievement declines while in online instruction;

The Director of State Relations for the Education Commission of the States (ECS) emphasized the importance of clearly defined terms, particularly such fundamental terms as “full-time online,” “supplemental online,” and “blended learning.” Regarding virtual school student populations, ECS indicated that such populations are composed of traditional students, English language learners, special needs students, former dropouts (for credit recovery), gifted and talented

## Virtual Education and Cyber Learning (Continued)

students, dually enrolled students, rural students and students seeking an alternative to traditional schools.

Finally, speaking to the issue of teacher certification, ECS explained that:

- almost all states require online teachers to be state-certified;
- some states allow university faculty to teach online courses;
- Minnesota requires all teachers to be trained to deliver digital and blended content;
- six states have adopted voluntary online teaching endorsements; and
- less than 40 percent of online teachers report receiving any professional development before they began online teaching.



*L-R: Senator Craig Brandt, Rio Rancho Cyber Academy (RRCA) Program Manager Heidi Parnell Kenworthy, Senator John Pinto, and RRCA Principal Jacquie Monclova discuss blended learning issues in Raton.*

## WHAT You Need to Know About...

### *Virtual and Cyber Education:*

- ✓ Virtual education can range from fully online models to blended models, which require in-school classroom seat time.
- ✓ Online public schools are not home school; courses are taught by a licensed teacher and subject to the same statutory requirements as brick-and-mortar public schools.
- ✓ Virtual charter schools typically receive less state funding per student than brick-and-mortar schools, with some states reducing their funding by a certain percentage.
- ✓ New Mexico currently has no statutory framework for virtual public schools.

## COMMUNITY AND SUPERINTENDENT INPUT

At the end of each interim meeting day, the LESC provides time for community members and school officials to provide public comment. These community input sessions provide an important forum for legislators on the committee to hear from constituents around the state.

Among comments provided during the June interim meeting at Raton High School, the following individuals made the following points:

- A commissioner for the Public Education Commission (PEC) stated that while attending a conference hosted by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers last year, he heard concerns in the charter school community that their reputation was being damaged by virtual charter schools, which generally have large percentages of dropouts and minimal reporting on what happens to them. In addition, he expressed concern that two more virtual charter school applicants were preparing to submit paperwork for PEC review by June 30, 2015.
- A board member for the Raton Chamber of Commerce, asserted that online education should be used as an economic driver. He also alluded to the positive aspects of providing online education in rural areas that otherwise face a decline in population due to the lack of educational services.

**Teacher Effectiveness Evaluation System - Second Year of Implementation:** LESC staff provided an overview which included the following information that is different for the second year of implementation:

- two pertinent provisions in Public Education Department (PED) rule that changed for school year 2014-2015 and succeeding years;
- PED's release of four resource videos that explain the calculation of certain elements of the Effectiveness Evaluation System (EES);
- revised changes to the NMTEACH rubric, in which PED has added language to clarify that teachers should make accommodations for special subgroups of students;
- an updated table of graduated considerations; and
- an EES summative report example, which PED released to provide as an example of a report that a teacher would receive from the school year 2014-2015.

The Chair indicated that the second year EES data results would be discussed at a later meeting since districts are still making inquiries to PED and the department is in the process of reviewing the inquiries.

PED staff informed the committee that the NMTEACH year two summative report:

- provided enhanced information for teachers to better understand performance;
- provided information that will improve professional development plans; and
- established an objective standard of performance in which professionals can improve.

PED indicated that the summative report has developed from a one-page report last year into a five or six page report depending on how many data points a teacher has. The department also conducted a walkthrough of the summative report.

**Instructional Materials Policy:** During the 2015 legislative session, two proposed pieces of legislation, HB 146aa, *Instructional Material Definitions & Changes*, and its companion, SB 225, would have amended the *Instructional Material Law* to allow instructional material allocations for digital media and further flexibility in the use of funds by removing the restriction on the percentage of allocations for materials not on the multiple list.

The Executive Director of Elementary Curriculum and Instruction and the Executive Director of Federal and Bilingual Programs of Rio Rancho Public Schools (RRPS) presented a policy overview of instructional materials at the LESC meeting in June.

Prior to Common Core, publishers faced challenges providing instructional materials aligned to each state's specific standards, so materials were mostly based on versions developed for larger states. Before the digital revolution, these materials were often traditional textbooks and educational technology in the classroom was limited. RRPS officials offered insight into the relationship between current New Mexico

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and use of technology and digital media as a means to prepare students for college and career readiness.

So what is the future for New Mexico students and how do we prepare them for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? RRPS stressed the importance of providing flexibility for school districts to determine the best instructional materials and moving toward 1:1 initiatives that guarantee students access to a digital learning community.

## WHAT You Need to Know About...

### *Teacher and School Leader Effectiveness Evaluation System (EES)*

#### *EES measures for public school teachers:*

- ✓ 50 percent based on student achievement growth, which requires school districts to use a department-adopted student achievement growth based on three or more years of student achievement growth data, or, with department permission, a combination of PED-approved growth measures and for non-tested subjects/grades, a PED-approved alternative measure;
- ✓ 25 percent based on two or three observations conducted by a certified or external observer, depending on the school district's plan; and
- ✓ 25 percent based on other multiple measures, which can include student/parent surveys and/or teacher attendance.

#### *EES measures for public school administrators:*

- ✓ 50 percent reflected through the change in a school's A through F letter grade;
- ✓ 25 percent based on the school's multiple measures; and
- ✓ 25 percent based upon documented fidelity observations of the school leader.

#### *The overall EES rating is based on the following five levels of performance:*

- ✓ exemplary (meets competency);
- ✓ highly effective (meets competency);
- ✓ effective (meets competency);
- ✓ minimally effective (does not meet competency); and
- ✓ ineffective (does not meet competency). **5**



## JULY AGENDA TOPICS

- **Reading Interventions:** LESC staff will compare FY 15 versus FY 16 appropriations for the Public Education Department's (PED's) *Reads to Lead!* program, followed by reports from public school officials on how funding is being used in urban districts and charter schools. In August, the committee will focus on how this funding is being used in rural schools.
- **Teacher and School Leader Program Update:** Presenters from PED, the University of New Mexico, and New Mexico State University will brief the LESC on their efforts to customize to fit New Mexico's needs a School Turnaround Program.
- **Teacher Preparation:** The Deans from several college education programs will report on their plans to implement SB 329aa, *School Licensure Reciprocity Requirements (Laws 2015, Chapter 97)*. A researcher from the Education Commission of the States will also provide a report on enhanced preservice clinical training.
- **School Transportation:** LESC staff will discuss the implementation plan for HB 164a, *School Transportation Info Reporting (Laws 2015, Chapter 57)*, and PED staff will do a comparison of FY 15 and FY 16 allocations.
- **School Transportation Program Design:** The superintendent of the Moriarty-Edgewood School District and Co-executive Directors of the New Mexico Coalition for Charter Schools will address the challenges of providing transportation over a wide geographic area, among other issues.
- **LESC and Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) Staff Policy Recommendations/Options for the Instructional Training and Experience Index and Instructional Material:** Staff from LESC and LFC will join to present options and recommendations that the committee may wish to consider to add stability to the budget process for districts and charter schools.

May 28  
State Capitol, Room 307  
Santa Fe

June 25-26  
Raton High School  
Raton

July 21-22  
Rio Rancho High School  
Rio Rancho

August 27-28  
Eastern NM University  
Roswell

# 2015 Interim Meeting Schedule



September 24-25  
Western NM University  
Silver City

October 28-30  
State Capitol, Room 307  
Santa Fe

November 18-20  
State Capitol, Room 307  
Santa Fe

December 16-18  
State Capitol, Room 307  
Santa Fe

January 18, 2016  
State Capitol, TBA  
Santa Fe

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